

Message Text

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ORIGIN PA-02

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 PRS-01 SSO-00 CCO-00 /019 R

DRAFTED BY PA/M:JCHAMBERLAIN:JC

APPROVED BY PA:WDYESS

S/S - MR. SEBASTIAN

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NO. 11 FOR CARTER FROM PA

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, OVIP (VANCE)

SUBJECT: PRESS MATERIAL

1. HERewith FULL TEXT WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL THURSDAY
MARCH 31 HEADED "SALT: A TIME FOR HUNKERING DOWN."

2. SECRETARY VANCE SAYS HE'S DISAPPOINTED THAT THE
RUSSIANS ACCEPTED NEITHER OF THE TWO STRATEGIC ARMS PRO-
POSALS HE BROUGHT TO MOSCOW--THE VLADIVOSTOK MISSILE
LEVELS MINUS CRUISE MISSILES AND BACKFIRE BOMBERS, OR SUB-
STANTIAL REDUCTIONS--AND SO ARE WE. BUT WE ARE NOT DESO-
LATE TO THE POINT OF THINKING THAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD
EITHER SWEETEN ITS OFFER TO MAKE IT MORE APPEALING TO THE
RUSSIANS, OR BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES FOR THE RESUMPTION OF
THE COLD WAR.

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3. THE NEGOTIATING POSITION PRESENTED BY MR. VANCE GAVE
MOSCOW THE CHANCE TO LIMIT THE NEW CRUISE-MISSILE TECH-
NOLOGY IN WHICH THE UNITED STATES IS FAR ADVANCED, IN RE-
TURN FOR THE MISSILE REDUCTIONS IN WHICH AMERICANS HAVE
A SPECIAL INTEREST. THAT OFFER IS NO LESS SOUND FOR THE
KREMLIN'S INABILITY TO ACCEPT IT QUICKLY. ON THE CONTRARY,
THE POSITION IS COMPLEX AND FAR-REACHING AND DEMANDED OF

THE RUSSIANS A MEASURE OF POLITICAL FLEXIBILITY THAT FEW, IF ANY, KNOWLEDGEABLE AMERICANS EXPECTED THEM TO DEMONSTRATE ON THE SPOT. THAT THEY ARE INTERESTED IN A BETTER REGULATED RELATIONSHIP WITH WASHINGTON IS EVIDENT FROM THEIR AGREEMENT TO SET UP 10 WORKING PARTIES ON AS MANY SEPARATE ISSUES (ARMS SALES, INDIAN OCEAN, ETC.). BUT THE SALT ISSUE OBVIOUSLY POSED TOUGHER PROBLEMS. THEIR FAILURE EVEN TO OFFER COUNTER-PROPOSALS, OTHER THAN TO REPEAT THEIR OLD OFFER TO RATIFY A VERSION OF THE VLADIVOSTOK AGREEMENT, WHICH NO LONGER COMMANDS A CONSENSUS IN WASHINGTON, SHOWS JUST HOW IMMOBILIZED THEY ARE.

4. WHY DID MOSCOW REACT AS IT DID? DOUBTLESS WE'LL ALL LEARN MORE IN THE DAYS TO COME. IT IS CONCEIVABLE, FOR INSTANCE, THAT THE RUSSIANS GAGGED ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY, WHICH PRESIDENT CARTER HAS MADE A PART OF HIS OVERALL APPROACH TO THE KREMLIN. IT IS POSSIBLE THE RUSSIANS MAY BE SO BENT ON ACHIEVING STRATEGIC SUPERIORITY THAT THEY COULD NOT HAVE FAILED TO REJECT ANY AMERICAN PROPOSALS AIMED, AS MR. CARTER'S WERE, AT STABILIZING AT LOWER COST AND RISK A STRATEGIC BALANCE.

5. TENTATIVELY WE WOULD GUESS, HOWEVER, THAT THE KREMLIN IS COMING INTO THE GRIP OF A SUCCESSION CRISIS THAT HAS RENDERED IT UNABLE TO TAKE ANY BUT THE SMALLEST CONSENSUS DECISIONS. THAT MUCH IS SUGGESTED BY REPORTS ON THE FAILING HEALTH OF LEONID BREZHNEV. THERE IS MUCH THAT OUTSIDERS DON'T KNOW ABOUT KREMLIN POLITICS. ONE THING UNCLASSIFIED

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THEY DO KNOW IS THAT WITHOUT STRONG LEADERSHIP THE KREMLIN HUNKERS DOWN. IF MR. BREZHNEV IS AILING PHYSICALLY, THEN UNQUESTIONABLY HE IS ALSO AILING POLITICALLY, AND HIS LEADERSHIP COLLEAGUES ARE FOCUSED NOT ON POLICY BUT ON POLITICS. IF THAT IS SO, THEN THAT IS ALL THE MORE REASON FOR WASHINGTON TO HUNKER DOWN AS WELL.

6. TO JUDGE BY MR. CARTER'S REMARKS YESTERDAY, HE IS PREPARED TO DO JUST THAT. HE MADE IT CLEAR TO MOSCOW THAT THE UNITED STATES PREFERS TO SERVE ITS OWN LEGITIMATE SECURITY INTERESTS BY PURSUING MUTUALLY ADVANTAGEOUS MEASURES OF ARMS CONTROL, AND THAT HE WILL CONSIDER TAKING INDEPENDENT STEPS TO BUILD MAJOR NEW WEAPONS SYSTEM ONLY IF THE KREMLIN LEADERSHIP, OLD OR NEW, SHOWS AS TIME GOES ON THAT IT REJECTS THE AMERICAN COMMITMENT TO SERIOUS ARMS CONTROL. (END TEXT.)
CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TEXT, PRESS COMMENTS, TOSEC, SALT (ARMS CONTROL), BRIEFING MATERIALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 31-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE071402
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: JCHAMBERLAIN:JC
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770111-0073
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t1977031/aaaaaavi.tel
Line Count: 114
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0a8d07ac-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN PA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2933079
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESS MATERIAL
TAGS: SOPN, OVIP, US, (VANCE, CYRUS R)
To: SECRETARY
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0a8d07ac-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009